



*Your Guide to the*

# GEORGIA COURTS

# *At the Courthouse*

The Georgia court system has five classes of trial-level courts: the magistrate, probate, juvenile, state, and superior courts. In addition, there are approximately 400 municipal courts operating locally. There are two appellate-level courts: the Supreme Court and Court of Appeals.

Each class of court has authority over specific case types as set forth in the Constitution of the State of Georgia.

## *Limited Jurisdiction Courts*

The municipal magistrate, probate, juvenile and state courts are funded solely by county or city governments and preside over cases that arise within their geographical boundaries. These judges hear certain traffic cases, misdemeanors, civil disputes and minor infractions.

## *General Jurisdiction Courts*

Superior courts exercise broad jurisdiction over civil and criminal matters. All felony cases are heard in the superior courts. These courts have exclusive jurisdiction over divorce and are authorized to review decisions of limited jurisdiction courts to correct errors.

## *Courts of Review*

The Court of Appeals is the court of final review for many civil and criminal cases appeal.

A panel of judges reviews records of cases appealed from a trial court decision to determine if procedural errors or significant errors of law were made.

The Supreme Court alone rules on questions involving the constitutionality of state statutes, cases involving a sentence of death, and petitions from decisions of the Court of Appeals.

# The Georgia Court System

(showing appellate routes)

## MUNICIPAL COURT\*

397 courts,  
377 judges active.

Jurisdiction (limited):

- Ordinance violations; criminal preliminaries; traffic, certain misdemeanors

*\*A small number of special courts, authorized by the Georgia Constitution, have limited civil or criminal jurisdiction throughout a designated county.*

## MAGISTRATE COURT

159 courts,  
159 chief magistrates;  
354 magistrates.

Jurisdiction (limited):

- Search and arrest warrants, felony and misdemeanor preliminaries, county ordinances.
- Civil claims of \$15,000 or less, dispossessories, distress warrants.

*No jury trials.*

## PROBATE COURT

159 courts, 159 judges.

*Jurisdiction (limited):*

- Exclusive jurisdiction in probate of wills, administration of estates, appointment of guardians, involuntary hospitalizations, marriage licenses.
- Traffic in some counties.

## JUVENILE COURT

159 courts, 120 judges  
and associate judges.

*Jurisdiction (limited):*

- Deprived, neglected, unruly, delinquent juveniles.
- Child custody, termination of parental rights.
- Juvenile traffic.

*No jury trials*

## STATE COURT

72 courts, 120 judges.

*Jurisdiction (limited) in certain counties*

- Civil law actions except cases within the exclusive jurisdiction of superior court.
- Misdemeanors, traffic, felony preliminaries.

*Jury trials.*

## SUPERIOR COURT

49 circuits, 205 judges.

*Jurisdiction (general):*

- Civil law actions, adoptions, misdemeanors, and other cases.
- Exclusive jurisdiction over divorce, title to land, equity.
- Exclusive felony jurisdiction.

*Jury trials.*

## COURT OF APPEALS

12 judges (4 divisions).

*Jurisdiction: Court of Review*

- Reviews trial courts decisions in all civil and criminal cases not specifically reserved to the Supreme Court.
- Corrects errors of law, does not alter jury verdicts.

## SUPREME COURT

7 justices.

*Jurisdiction: Court of Review*

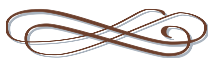
- Review of certain decisions made by limited jurisdiction courts.
- Exclusive jurisdiction over questions of constitutional issue, title to land, validity of and construction of wills, habeas corpus, convictions of capital felonies, equity, divorce, alimony, election contests.
- Certified questions and petitions from decisions of the Court of Appeals.

Counties with population over 96,000 where probate judge is attorney practicing at least seven years.  
*Jury trials.*

Capital felonies.  
Constitutional issues.  
Title to land.  
Wills, equity, and divorce.

# *Court Operations*

Managing today's court operations requires the expertise of many professionals other than judges. Court administrators, court clerks, prosecutors, jury managers, and court reporters are only a few of the staff members who are essential to keeping our trial and appellate courts working smoothly. Issues and decisions regarding automation technology, courthouse design and security, preservation and safekeeping of records make the business of court administrators and other courthouse personnel both complex and indispensable.



## *Citizen Jurors*

Jury trials are a hallmark of the American legal system. Each day around the state, our trial courts require hundreds of ordinary citizens to report to the courthouse for jury duty. Both a right and responsibility, service as a juror places the individual citizen in a central role in the justice system.

## *Court Funding*

At the appellate level, salaries and operating expenses are paid from state revenues. Funding for the superior and juvenile courts is shared by state and county funding sources. Limited jurisdiction courts are funded solely by city or county governments.

# *Serving the Courts*

*The Judicial Council/Administrative Office of the Courts* was established in 1973 to provide support services to the courts of Georgia. The agency oversees the annual workload assessment for the superior courts, secures grants for locally-administered drug courts and other projects, promotes automation efforts, and assists the trial court councils. The AOC also serves as the fiscal officer for a variety of judicial branch commissions and councils.

As an administrative arm of the Supreme Court of Georgia, the AOC operates under the guidance of the Judicial Council, a policy-making body chaired by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Georgia.



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